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Local News: Saturday, July 06, 2002

Seattle's latest effort to pry us from cars

By [Susan Gilmore](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

The city of Seattle wants to hire car parkers, and we don't mean valet attendants.

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As part of an experiment to reduce neighborhood traffic and ease air pollution, the city's Department of Transportation is looking for volunteers to park one of their cars for nine weeks this fall, relying, instead, on buses, bicycles and foot power.

It's the third, and longest, test of the Way to Go Seattle program, funded by a federal grant.

"By making smart transportation choices, Seattle families can not only save an average of over \$4,000 a year (\$85 a week), but improve neighborhood livability and the environment," said Jemae Hoffman, the department's mobility manager.

"If every household in Seattle did what the 23 participants in the previous study round did, nearly 16 million miles of automobile traffic would be kept out of our neighborhoods and 7,160 tons of carbon dioxide would be kept out of our air each week."

Last year, 23 families agreed to give up one car for six weeks. That followed a similar experiment in 2000 in which 22 families went without one of their cars.

This time the city is hoping to get more volunteers — as many as 40 — and have a longer testing time, nine weeks.

"We saw the change over the weeks," said Hoffman, of the decision to run the test longer this time. "By the fourth week they were getting good."

She said studies show that 75 percent of all car trips aren't work-related, so individual choices can reduce neighborhood traffic and pollution. After the last test, she said, five of the 23 families sold their second cars.

Janet Watness, who participated in the study with her husband, David, and 17-year-old daughter Elice, said her family decided to sell their second car, a 1980 Honda Civic.

"It's been an adventure," Watness said. "When it was time to give up a car I figured out it was not so hard to take the bus."

She commutes by bus from Northgate to her job on Queen Anne, and her husband



often takes the bus to offices in West Seattle and downtown. Her daughter buses to school.

"It's part of our lives now," Watness said, adding that she's walked so much she's entering the Avon Breast Cancer walk next month, when she'll walk 60 miles.

The newest study will ask drivers to keep diaries of their driving habits for three weeks, then to use those as a baseline for the next nine weeks when they go without a car.

The families will get \$85 for each week they participate, the amount the city thinks is the national average cost of owning and operating a second car.

Hoffman said most families in the test will spend \$10 to \$15 a week getting around, saving about \$70 a week.

Participants must agree to keep detailed diaries of their travel. The city will check the odometers of the parked cars to make sure they don't move in the weeks of the test.

Hoffman said the advantages participants cited after the last program were: developing a sense of community by walking to the bus, talking to neighbors and discovering neighborhood shops; saving money on parking; discovering bike routes; and getting in better shape.

The participants kept diaries of the transportation they used — whether they walked, rode the bus, biked, car-pooled, took taxis or used FlexCar, a car-sharing program run by a local company. The 23 families made nearly 1,200 fewer car trips — about 7,600 miles total — during the study.

Almost everyone, said Hoffman, made it through the six weeks without using the second car. Only once, she said, did someone break down. That was a man who, near the end of the study, used his truck to tote his Milk Carton Derby entry to Green Lake.

Under the city project, anyone who sells a car after the test gets a one-year bus pass and membership in FlexCar.

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FACTS

Volunteers needed

The city of Seattle is looking for families who will give up driving their second cars for nine weeks this fall. Participating families will get \$85 a week.

Volunteers must live in Seattle and have only as many cars as licensed drivers in their house. Those interested may call 206-615-1550 to get an application or apply online at the project's Web site, www.cityofseattle.net/waytogo.

Applications will be accepted through July 31. The study will begin in September.

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